



Yom Kippur: The Holiest Day of the year begins tonight.

These two most important days of the Jewish calendar that are ten days apart, Rosh Hasana, and Yom Kippur, the High Holy Days, are a time of celebration and contemplation; from the joyous greeting of the New Year, a time of reflection ends in the somber Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, "The Sabbath of Sabbaths."

By Yom Kippur, the forty Days of Repentance, which begins with the first of Elul, have passed. On Rosh Hashanah, the Lord has judged most of mankind, and has recorded his judgment in the Book of Life; but he has given a ten day reprieve. On Yom Kippur, the Book of Life is closed and sealed. Those that have repented for their sins are granted a good and happy New Year.

Since Yom Kippur is the day to ask forgiveness for promises broken to God, the day before is reserved for asking forgiveness for broken promises between people, as God cannot forgive broken promises between people.

Yom Kippur is a day of "NOT" doing. There is no blowing of the Shofar and Jews may not eat or drink, as fasting is the rule. It is believed that to fast on Yom Kippur is to emulate the angels in heaven, who do not eat, drink, or wash. According to the bible, these are the five prohibitions of Yom Kippur:

1. Eating and drinking
2. Anointing with perfumes or lotions
3. Marital relations
4. Washing
5. Wearing leather shoes

On the eve of Yom Kippur, the community gathers at the synagogue. Men put on prayer shawls (not usually worn in the evenings). Then as the night falls the cantor begins the "*Kol Nidre*", it is repeated 3 times, each time in a louder voice. The Kol Nidre emphasizes the importance in keeping vows, as violating an oath is one of the worst sins. An important part of the Yom Kippur service is the "*Vidui*" (*Viduy*) or confession. The confessions serve to help reflect on ones misdeeds and to confess them verbally is part of the formal repentance in asking God's forgiveness. Because community and unity are an important part of Jewish Life, the confessions are said in the plural (We are guilty.)

As Yom Kippur ends, at the last hour a service called "*Ne'ilah*" (*Neilah*) offers a final opportunity for repentance. It is the only service of the year during which the doors to the Ark (where the Torah scrolls are stored) remain open from the beginning to end of the service, signifying that the gates of Heaven are open at this time.

The service closes with the verse, said seven times, "The Lord is our God." The Shofar is sounded once and the congregation proclaims - "Next year in Jerusalem."

Tonight Kol Nidre begins at the Temple Beth Israel on Lacle Boulevard at 6:30 pm. There will be services tomorrow morning, and Mincha and Ne'elah: will begin at 4:30 pm. The island's Jewish community traditionally shares a breaking of the fast afterwards, and visitors are welcome, usually each community member prepares a dairy dish or dessert to share.

